



ACTION LINE C.1
Subgroup – ICT and Parliaments
Parliaments in the Information Age
- mobilizing stakeholders around concrete initiatives -

24 May 2007
Palais des Nations – Room IX
Geneva, Switzerland

Informal summary

Introduction

The meeting “Parliaments in the Information Age - mobilizing stakeholders around concrete initiatives” was organized in Geneva on 24 May 2007 by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in their capacity as co-facilitators of the Subgroup on ICT and Parliaments. The subgroup activities fall within the framework of WSIS Action Line C1 “The role of public governance authorities and all stakeholders in the promotion of ICT for development”, facilitated by UNDESA.

The Subgroup was established following a request made by participants at the first consultation meeting on the implementation of Action Line C1 convened by UNDESA in Geneva on 16 May 2006, and as a result of online consultations on the theme.

The objective of the Subgroup on ICT and Parliaments is to conduct consultations on the specific role of parliaments in the promotion of ICT- related legislation and the use of ICT in parliaments for the modernization of their organizational processes.

On behalf of UNDESA and IPU, the leading force behind the facilitation of this Subgroup is the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, the joint initiative established by UNDESA and IPU in 2006 whose objectives largely coincide with those of the Subgroup.

The meeting brought together stakeholders undertaking activities in the ICT and Parliament domain to exchange experiences, create synergies and facilitate collaboration. Participants included representatives of international organizations, national and regional parliaments, civil society and academia, and Members of Parliament.

The meeting comprised five plenary sessions: a first session featuring two keynote addresses, a second session on the role of parliaments in advancing the Information Society, a third session focusing on Open Source in Parliament, a fourth session on the current and upcoming activities of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, and a concluding session dedicated to presentations of ongoing initiatives and technical assistance programmes.

During rich and productive discussions participants underlined the need for enhanced coordination between the international actors working with parliaments and ICT, including from within the UN system, in order to avoid duplication and maximize effectiveness. In this regard, participants expressed satisfaction for the establishment of the Subgroup on ICT and Parliaments which, in cooperation with the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, will provide a platform for continued dialogue and cooperation.

Opening session

The meeting was opened by Mr. Patrizio Civili, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of UNDESA, and Mr. Anders B. Johnsson, Secretary General of the IPU.

Mr. **Civili** expressed satisfaction for the productive collaboration between UNDESA and IPU and recalled the role and the mandate of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, jointly established by the two institutions in 2006.

Mr. Civili stressed that the objectives of the Global Centre largely coincide with the purpose of the Subgroup on ICT and Parliaments. Following the first consultation meeting of Action Line C1 in May 2006, and the subsequent establishment of the Subgroup, the Global Centre started to map partners, initiatives, documentation and collaborative efforts in two specific areas of work: (a) parliaments' role in the promotion of the Information Society; (b) applications of ICT tools for the modernization of parliamentary processes (e-parliament), including inter-parliamentary cooperation.

Mr. Civili stated that UNDESA had consulted with a large number of actors to help connect in a more coherent way the efforts of the international community in these areas of work. He then highlighted some relevant activities and mechanisms that in recent months have helped all stakeholders strengthen their coordination potential in this domain, such as the "IPAIT V" Conference held in Finland in January 2007, "The Policymaking role of Parliaments in the Development of the Information Society" Conference held in Italy in March 2007, the Africa i-Parliament Action Plan; the launch of the Global Network of IT experts in Parliament and the work on eDemocracy carried out by the Council of Europe.

Mr. Civili concluded by underlining that much remains to be done with regard to coherence, harmonization of actions and common approaches particularly by development partners and key players, including parliaments, in the area of technical assistance.

Mr. **Johnsson** commended UNDESA on the establishment of the Subgroup on ICT and Parliaments. He stressed the importance and uniqueness of the Subgroup which is a United Nations mechanism that identifies parliaments as active participants and makes them full part of the implementation process of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

He then reiterated the two interconnected areas of work of the Subgroup: a) the role of parliaments in advancing the Information Society through their work; b) how parliaments make good use of ICT to improve their work.

Mr. Johnsson recalled some of the activities carried out by IPU that have ICT as an important component. He mentioned, in particular, a major study on "*Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: A guide to good practice*", concluded by IPU last year. This study provides a comprehensive and systematic account of the central role that parliament plays in a democracy and explains what it means for a parliament to be truly representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective in its many functions. He then recalled a number of country-based activities and stated that IPU's work is now focusing on how parliaments can become more accessible to the public.

Keynote addresses

Mr. Stefano Rodotà, Professor of Law, University of Rome "La Sapienza", and Mr. Ross Ferguson, Director, eDemocracy Programme, Hansard Society, delivered keynote addresses that helped set the stage for the subsequent discussions.

Mr. **Rodotà** stressed that Parliaments in modern societies cannot afford to neglect the impact that new technologies are having on their role and on their relation with society. He stressed that ICT are not only technical tools but a powerful force that is radically transforming our societies. While highlighting the sins and virtues of the Information Age, Mr. Rodotà emphasized that the first major task of Parliaments is to act as guarantor of freedom and equality and ensure that all technologies will ultimately strengthen democracy overall.

Mr. Rodotà stressed that providing access is not merely providing connectivity to the Internet but access to Knowledge as the most important of all common goods. Mr. Rodotà then emphasized that the true democratic novelty of ICT is not giving citizens the illusion of participating in the decision-making processes through electronic referendums but rather giving them the power to make use of the extraordinary wealth of information placed at their disposal by technology, to elaborate proposals and control the way power is exercised. He underlined that Parliaments must find new ways of communicating with citizens, also by holding informal consultations or by placing proposals on the Internet for which they seek the opinions of citizens. This would help parliamentary democracy gain new legitimacy and Parliament would put itself forward as a permanent interlocutor of society.

Mr. Rodotà highlighted that Parliaments must step up their role in various directions:

- promoting transparency throughout the whole institutional system, making it increasingly possible for citizens to exercise "active citizenship".
- becoming the institutional forum in which the effects of the new technologies are constantly appraised taking up and updating the experience of technology assessment.
- avoiding that ICT diffusion and use lead to a society of surveillance, selection and control, which alters the democratic character of the political system in which Parliaments are the prime and essential guarantors.

Mr. Rodotà urged parliaments to remove politics from the blandishments of a technology which allows evading the difficulties of taking decisions. Parliaments should use ICT in a way that will ensure that decisions once again become the prerogative of visible, accountable and controllable parties. He finally highlighted that ICT offer great opportunity to enhance inter-parliamentary cooperation by facilitating knowledge acquirement and sharing.

Mr. **Ferguson**, Director of the e-Democracy Programme of the Hansard Society, made an analogy between parliaments and businesses and stated that parliaments are seriously underperforming. Among the different factors that have contributed to and are still being the cause of this underperformance he mentioned the executives covertly and overtly bypassing the parliamentary process and a pronounced disrespect and disengagement between citizens and parliamentarians.

He underlined that parliaments' underperformance is a fundamental threat to the stability of representative democracy. According to Mr. Ferguson, part of the solution lies in mobilizing ICT which can benefit Parliaments' three core business areas: scrutiny, law making and representation. ICT can enhance parliaments' efficiency by making them capable of better timetabling, task management, and coordination between operational units. ICT can increase parliaments' effectiveness by making them capable, for example, of more coherent tracking of government policy activity. Finally, ICT enable better communication by making parliaments capable to gather and disseminate information more incisively and more widely.

Mr. Ferguson then highlighted that the reasons Parliaments are so slow and in places so resistant to taking up ICT are diverse and have much to do with the cultural, economic and political histories of the societies in which a particular Parliament operates. In the first place, people's today expect parliamentarians to be responsive, interactive and informed, whereas they more commonly present themselves as detached, expert, managers. Secondly, Parliaments find making internal organizational changes most difficult as reprioritising resources, for example, can mean reductions in areas previously used to plenty. Thirdly, Parliaments, governments and public bodies are notorious for doing ICT development badly and ICT, being a fast moving target, presents some particular difficulties for Parliaments.

Mr. Ferguson remarked that research, development and delivery are needed in order to overcome these obstacles. He stressed that there is a need for rigorous, reliable data sets to make sufficient business cases to mitigate the risk-aversion of politicians and to demonstrate to the public and stakeholders that progress is being made. He also emphasized the importance of the construction of policies, the release of sustainable budgets and the training of people to see through the set up, management and evaluation of Parliaments' use of ICT. Finally, he stressed the importance of the

development of processes, applications and standards that are scalable, fit for purpose and cost-effective.

He concluded by expressing support to the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, a body well-positioned and well-resourced to promote this agenda and secure its realisation.

The role of parliaments in advancing the Information Society

The session was chaired by Mr. **Johnsson**. Two panelists made presentations.

Mr. Mincho Viktorov **Spasov**, Vice President of IPAIT and Member of the National Assembly of Bulgaria, elaborated on how Society “turns the wheel” of the trias politica model, in which the separated powers Executive, Judiciary and Parliament, ideally are leveraging upon each other, by independently carrying out their functions and responsibilities. However in many democracies around the world the Judiciary and Parliamentary powers find themselves “out leveraged” by a disproportionately powerful Executive. As a result the model becomes unbalanced.

Mr. Spasov stressed that ICT offer opportunities to empower both the Judiciary and Parliamentary powers, to bring transparency and to help repair malfunctions. He highlighted that Parliaments have to promote laws that facilitate the introduction of ICT in Parliament, Government and the Judiciary.

Mr. Spasov concluded by announcing the fifth General Assembly of IPAIT which will be taking place in Sofia, Bulgaria from 8-11 June 2008.

Mr. Enrico **Seta**, Senior Advisor, Chamber of Deputies of Italy, stressed out the importance and the successful outcome of the Conference “The policymaking role of Parliaments in the development of the Information Society”, organized on 3-4 March 2007 in Rome by the Chamber of Deputies, under the framework of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. Over 350 participants attended the Conference, among which 68 Parliamentary delegations – 16 led by the Speaker – as well as other international organizations and institution.

The Conference represented a high-level Forum where participants were able to exchange their ideas and experiences. The outcome document of the Conference was a Presidency’s Summary containing recommendations on how national and regional assemblies can best contribute to the development of an inclusive and equitable Information Society. The document encouraged parliaments to act: a) as a political guarantor against the technocratic risks of the Information Society; b) as a social guarantor; c) as the main actor in protecting fundamental rights; d) as an institution proactive in combating the risk of cultural and linguistic standardization; e) as an institutional guarantor; and f) as a promoter of inter-national cooperation in favour of emerging democracies.

Parliaments and Open Source

The session was chaired by Mr. Gherardo **Casini**, Executive Coordinator a.i. of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament. Mr. Flavio Zeni, Chief technical Adviser, UNDESA, made a presentation on open source and open standards in Africa: The Africa i-Parliaments Action Plan.

Mr. Flavio **Zeni** highlighted that ICT have brought unprecedented opportunities for parliaments both in terms of greater accessibility and enhanced collaboration. The adoption of a local approach for long time, however, did not allow parliaments to take full advantage of these powerful tools. Mr. Zeni stressed the need for a regional/global approach and the importance of exploiting the opportunities of ICT to interconnect parliaments through network of experiences, knowledge and information services.

Mr. Zeni then presented the Africa i-Parliaments Action Plan in 2006. This Programme builds on two main tools developed during the implementation of the UNDESA Programme “Strengthening Information Systems in Africa”: a) Akoma Ntoso, a parliamentary Document Open Access Infrastructure; and b) Bungeni, a parliamentary and legislative information system

Akoma Ntoso is a set of common standards to produce, classify and share digital parliamentary and legislative documents, which aims to improve access to parliamentary documents, enhance cooperation and reduce the costs of parliamentary IT support systems.

Bungeni is an integrated suite of multi-platform architecture software applications based on Open Source Software and Open Standards that automate the lifecycle of parliamentary documents. Bungeni is meant to provide the technological tools to create open, public and fully transparent institutions and a dialogue between constituents and legislators that can strengthen accountability and good governance.

The approach behind the development of Bungeni is that of the collaborative software development which is based on the collaboration among parliaments to build a high quality sustainable information system for all African Parliaments.

The Global Centre for ICT in Parliament

This session addressed the current and upcoming activities of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament with a particular focus on the preparation of a Global Report on ICT in Parliament.

Mr. **Casini** provided an overview of the activities of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament and how it operates. He recalled the work plan adopted by the Board of the Global Centre at its first meeting in March 2007 in Rome and reported on the status of its implementation.

He highlighted the Global Network of IT Experts in Parliament - introduced in late March 2007 - an online knowledge platform on the Global Centre’s website through which members (IT Experts) are able to interact and share information on best practices and ICT solutions which support parliamentary work in the areas of information & knowledge management, as well as in the

communication with the public. He stated that more than fifty members have already joined the network.

Mr. Casini also stated that the Global Centre has commenced with the preparations for the Global Report on ICT in Parliament. This Report aims to assess the state of ICT adoption and deployment in Parliaments world-wide, establishes a base-line for trend analysis, provides a tool for self evaluation and identifies examples of best practices. The report will be complemented by a series of data and indicators compiled on the basis of a global survey on the use of ICT by legislatures around the world. The survey to collect the data is being prepared and will be finalized shortly.

The Global Centre is organizing a World e-Parliament Conference – “Challenges and benefits of ICT in parliamentary processes” - with the goal of facilitating among legislatures the sharing of experiences and the identification of successful approaches and good practices. The Conference is scheduled to be held in Autumn 2007.

In addition, with the assistance of its network of partners, the Global Centre will soon launch a pilot phase of an International Fellowship/Staff Exchange Programme with the aim of facilitating capacity building and sharing of skills and experiences between IT experts from ICT mature and ICT-developing parliaments.

Mr. Jeffrey **Griffith**, Senior Advisor of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, briefed the participants on the preparation of the survey that will help collect the data on the use of ICT in Parliament to be included in the Global Report on ICT in Parliament.

The survey will develop a methodology for measuring the development and deployment of ICT in parliaments and providing baseline data that can be updated over time. These indicators will provide a better understanding of the trends and progress in the use of ICT in legislatures.

In addition to basic information about each country and its Parliament, the areas to be covered include the following: 1).Access to and Use of ICT; 2) ICT planning, management, budget, and operations; 3) Technologies and applications in use; 4) Content creation and management; 5) Knowledge management and Website design; and 6) Systems for communications with citizens.

Mr. Griffith also highlighted some of the challenges that the construction of the survey will present and the criteria it should meet, such as being relatively easy to understand, able to be answered in a multi-lingual world, and be easily summarized; being as objective and reliable as possible so that different people from the same legislature would give the same answer to a question; covering all the major technical, organizational, and functional issues in a balanced way so that no issue or set of issues predominates, being sufficiently flexible to accommodate variations in the authority and responsibility among parliaments; and requiring a minimum amount to time to complete.

Presentations of Parliament-to-Parliament and donor-funded projects and activities in the ICT and Parliament domain

During this session participants had the opportunity to present their programmes and learn about the activities undertaken by other institutions and organizations. The session was chaired by Mr. Geoff Q. Doidge, House Chairperson of Committees and ICT of the National Assembly of South Africa.

Mr. **Seta** stated that the Chamber of Deputies of Italy adopted a combination of a top-down (from politics to administration) and bottom-up approach (within the administration: from a “core group” towards new branches involved) in introducing ICT in its work. He then provided an overview of the main activities carried out in this area since the late nineties.

Following a parliamentary resolution advocating for a public free database containing all of the Italian legislation, in 1999 the Chamber of Deputies participated in the launch of the “Norme in rete” project, led by the Italian Ministry of Justice. The objective was to create a cooperative system based on a *standardized approach* in order to share legislative documents published on the web. In 2000 the Chamber of Deputies participated in the launch of the “107 project” which aimed at making available the Italian legislation on a public Website. Mr. Seta also presented the Chamber of Deputies’ activities relating to XML standardization processes. With regard to inter-parliamentary cooperation he recalled the Chamber’s active involvement in the work of the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament and the organization of the Conference “The policymaking role of Parliaments in the development of the Information Society”, organized in Rome in March 2007.

Mr. Seta then stressed that a number of lessons learned could be drawn from the experience of the Chamber of Deputies such as the importance of an informal and mixed core group of ICT innovation advocates, the need for the support of the top level administration; the importance of the involvement and commitment of the political governing bodies, the need for an ICT development strategy, which is elaborated and updated each year, and the importance of experience sharing and inter-parliamentary cooperation.

Mr. Dirk **Toornstra**, Special Advisor for the promotion of Democracy of the European Parliament, stated that while the European Parliament cannot be considered an innovator in this area of work, ICT have been increasingly recognized as important strategic tools. He stated that 6% of the European Parliament’s budget is currently devoted to IT matters and 6% to Communication matters.

Mr. Toornstra stressed that outreach activities of the European Parliament have been limited for a long time to making available adopted resolutions and documents and representatives themselves were expected to develop their own communication activities/strategies. He stated that the European Parliament is now adopting a decentralized approach and each Committee has its own website to reach out to the public.

Mr. Toornstra also stressed that the European Parliament is supporting the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament and its objectives since its inception and underlined the importance of gathering data on the ICT status in parliaments and collecting best practices and lessons learned.

Mr. Mauro **Massoni**, Head of the Multilateral Office, Directorate General for Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy, highlighted that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy strongly believes that ICT can help enhance Parliaments' accountability, transparency and inclusiveness, contributing effectively to reinforcing good governance and democratic practices worldwide. He stressed that in this specific area of work donors and international institutions can achieve a greater coherence and effectiveness by harmonizing and coordinating interventions with a view to reach better results and avoid fragmentation of activities.

He stressed that since late 2002, the Italian Development Cooperation has been supporting the programme "Strengthening Parliamentary Information Systems in Africa" implemented by UNDESA with the objective to contribute to the modernization of parliamentary practices in nine African Parliaments. The programme has now evolved into a full continental challenge – the Africa i-Parliaments Action Plan – a major initiative embraced by several African assemblies under the auspices of the Pan African Parliament. Since 2005 the Italian Development Cooperation has strongly supported the establishment of the Global Centre for ICT.

He then highlighted the importance of promoting a structured dialogue and sound partnerships among the different stakeholders in the ICT in Parliament domain. He emphasized that Parliaments should work together and benefit from the abundance of information and the accumulated expertise towards legislations that enhance our standard of living in order to narrow differences and strengthen the ties between parliaments and people.

Mr. **Ferguson** stated that the e-Democracy Programme of the Hansard Society was established in 1997 as part of the research and development activities of the organization and represents 1/5 of the activities of the Organization. Its main objective is to find innovative ways of using new interactive technologies to connect Parliament and citizens, and encourage participation in the democratic process. Mr. Ferguson provided an overview of some of the main e-Democracy projects.

Since 1997, the Hansard Society, through the TellParliament project (www.tellparliament.net), has been evaluating the contribution that ICT can make to parliamentary processes and participation, including by examining web-based technology in the context of parliamentary consultations and inquiries.

Under the project "citizen calling" (www.citizencalling.com), the eDemocracy Programme run a pilot consultation exercise for four weeks in September – October 2006 on the theme 'Young People and the Criminal Justice System'. The pilot was a unique experiment, allowing evidence to be submitted to a parliamentary committee using mobile phone technology.

Under the "Parliament for the future" project (www.p4tf.org.uk), the eDemocracy Programme is conducting a research to explore the contribution technology has made to democratic processes to date. The project seeks to map how technology has been used to date in the areas of information, legislation and representation, which technologies or processes might emerge in these areas over the

next five years, by what means and measurements Parliament can plan strategically towards future ICT investment and provision.

Ms. Ruth **Martinez**, Basque Parliament, presented the Basque Parliament activities toward enhancing citizen's participation. She stated that the Basque Parliament model for citizen participation is based on certified and visible participation, pro-activity, and availability of information in real time. In order to implement the model the Basque Parliament redesigned its webpage and developed the "Parte Hartu/Take part" participation system in December 2006. Through a website (<http://partaide.parlam.euskadi.net>) managed by the Parliament's Information System, citizens can interact with the different parliamentary groups of the Basque Parliament and ask questions on a wide range of themes. The website is complemented by Parlambus, a bus that reaches the different areas of the country with the objective of promoting active citizens' participation.

Ms. Martinez also stressed that the Basque Parliament supports inter-parliamentary cooperation and participates in the Digital Local Agenda initiative (www.digitallocalagenda.com), a local Strategic Plan for the Development of the Information Society in a given region, city or municipality to boost the development through the use of ICT.

Mr. Makane **Faye**, Programme Manager of the ICT, Science and Technology Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), presented the UNECA Capacity Building Programme for Policy Makers and other Stakeholders. Within the framework of this Programme, in 1999, UNECA set up the Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA) aimed to showcase the role of ICT in development, promote networking and carry out research and capacity building activities on emergency issues of the Information Society.

In March 2003, UNECA, in cooperation with Industry Canada, launched a Seminar Series on ICT and Policy Awareness for African Parliamentarians. Since then, Capacity Building workshops were organized in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Gambia, Niger, Swaziland and Kenya. Mr. Faye stressed that, as a result of the workshops, MPs are increasingly involved as stakeholders in the ICT policy implementation process in Member States and make use of ICT to improve their activities, interact with constituents, and participate in regional and global debates. In the future, UNECA is planning to develop a more structured training manual, to organize more training workshops at the sub-regional level and to equip selected Parliaments with the necessary technologies and skills.

Mr. Thomas **Huyghebaert**, Programme Officer of the Global Programme for Parliamentary Strengthening of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided an overview of UNDP's activities to achieve Parliamentary Strengthening, improve Parliament's key functions and enhance the participation of women in politics. He underlined the need for an evolution in the types of support to Parliaments, such as more attention to Parliaments in the context of post-crises and strong emphasis on the role of women in Parliament. Mr. Huyghebaert also stated that UNDP is trying to change approaches, build knowledge through research, and build practical tools for parliamentarians.

Among the number of lessons learned he presented within the use of ICT as a means for empowering parliaments, he mentioned the need for getting to know local realities to determine what type of ICT can be used without proceeding on a "one size fits all" basis; the importance of

long-term sustained engagement to achieve project effectiveness as well as the importance of south-south good practice exchanges and collaboration.

Mr. Huyghebaert finally presented the initiative “iKNOW Politics”, an International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics consisting in an online workspace designed to serve the needs of elected officials, candidates, political party leaders and members, researchers, students and other practitioners interested in advancing women in politics.

Ms. Elisabet **Lindquist Michailaki**, representative of the Swedish Parliament and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) provided an update on the use of ICT within the Swedish Parliament. Ms. Michailaki reported that significant efforts have been made to develop IT competencies within the administration, to create an IT-architecture, to increase the synchronization of the public website and the intranet, and to digitalize parliamentary documents and make them available on web site.

She then stated that the Swedish Parliament has been involved in several projects, such as helping Vietnam to set up its parliamentary website and participating in a needs assessment and project planning concerning improved ICT support, knowledge management system on request of IPU officials. The Swedish Parliament is also closely cooperating and exchanging information with IT Departments of the Scandinavian parliaments.

Ms. Michailaki made then a presentation on the Parliamentary Libraries & Research Services Section of IFLA. She recalled the main functions of the Parliamentary Libraries & Research Services: a) give assistance for parliamentarians in carrying out their legislative and oversight functions; b) be a basic component in the development of democratic legislatures throughout the world; c) promote openness, transparency and the strengthening of democratic participation; and d) develop and promote standards and best practices in providing information and knowledge to Parliaments. Ms. Michailaki stated that the Section’ main objectives are to identify best practices for the operations of parliamentary libraries and research services.

Ms. Michailaki informed participants that the 23rd Annual Conference of Library and Research Services for Parliaments will be held in Cape Town on 15-17 August. She then stated that the Section looks forward to collaborating with the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament including by helping the Centre with the distribution of the survey on the ICT use in parliaments.

Mr. Mats **Lindberg**, Good Governance in the Information Society Programme of the Council of Europe, provided an overview of the objectives of the ad hoc Committee on e-democracy (CAHDE) recently established by the Council of Europe. The Committee is instructed to examine developments on e-democracy/e-participation at European and international level with a view to identifying political, social, ethical, legislative and technological issues and their interdependence, as well as examples of emerging good practice which could be of interest to member states. Mr. Lindberg stated that as part of its activities, the Committee organized on 23-24 April an International Symposium on e-Democracy.

Ms. Josta **de Hoog**, Director of Politix Foundation, briefly presented Politix, a website that tracks voting behaviour of political parties in the Dutch National Parliament.. The website allows visitors

to discuss and vote on proposed laws and amendments. The website is updated every week, after the voting session in Parliament. The website was launched in May 2006.

Next steps and closing remarks

Mr. **Johnsson** expressed satisfaction for the meeting and its outcome. He commended the speakers for their interesting presentations on the role of Parliaments in advancing the Information Society. He highlighted that the survey that is being prepared by the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament will be a critical tool which can help advance the work of all the organizations and institutions working in this area. He stressed that the challenge remains coordination of efforts, dialogue and exchange of information among the different stakeholders and encouraged participants to work in this direction.

Mr. **Casini** reiterated the importance of the establishment of the Subgroup which will be instrumental to ensure coordination of efforts and the value of the collaboration between UNDESA and IPU. He reiterated the need to gather best practices and lessons learned. He also recommended better cooperation and joint activities in the African context among UNDESA, UNECA and UNDP.